

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 17, 2005

Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez
U.S. Department of Commerce
14th and Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We are writing on behalf of the more than 1,300 Maine fishermen and their families in York, Cumberland, Sagadahoc, Lincoln, Knox, Waldo, Hancock, and Washington counties who have been affected by the closure of shellfish beds due to red tide. As you know, Maine waters are being plagued by the worst outbreak of red tide since 1972, which has resulted in the closure of most shellfish areas in the state. The duration of the closures is currently unknown.


Governor John Baldacci of Maine has declared an emergency for the shellfish industry, as the closure of these fisheries will cause immediate economic impact for the fishermen and the businesses that benefit from the industry.


Maine's shellfish industry is a critical part of Maine's economy, accounting for approximately \$75 million annually in economic activity. The fishermen who rely on this natural resource depend heavily on the summer season to make the majority of their livelihood. It can take several weeks for shellfish to rid themselves of this toxin once the red tide is gone, but added to the duration of the red tide itself, this unknown period of closure will almost certainly create a disaster for our shellfish industry.

This critical situation demands action and we ask that you explore options available to you under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and Section 308(b) of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act to declare a commercial fishery failure. Federal assistance released as a result of this declaration would provide much needed assistance to affected fishermen and their families. A similar declaration has already been issued for the Massachusetts shellfish fishery and we look forward to your prompt attention to the status of the Maine fishery.

We urge you to instruct NOAA Fisheries to expedite preparation of a disaster analysis and your immediate disaster declaration. Thank you for your time and efforts on behalf of the Maine shellfish industry.

Sincerely,


OLYMPIA J. SNOWE
United States Senator


SUSAN M. COLLINS
United States Senator


THOMAS H. ALLEN
Member of Congress


MICHAEL H. MICHAUD
Member of Congress